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## DOCTOR AND MRS. WILLIAM THORNTON.

By ALLEN C. CLARK.

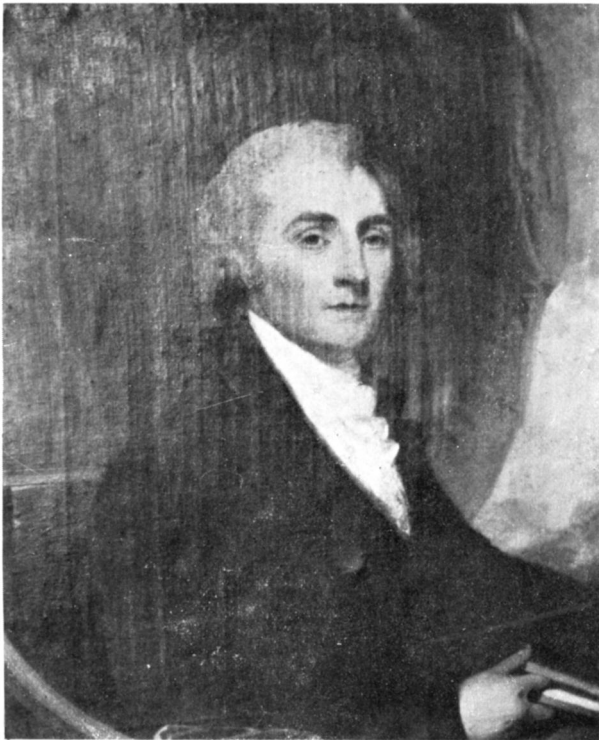
(Read before the Society, May 19, 1914.)

Thomas Carlyle's endurable works of profundity had less sale than the evanescent fictions of the day. Of the seeming lack of appreciation he complained, so it is said, to his publishers. All, and that includes the less deep, have a concernment in a life. Even the creation of a novelist moves the emotions. Each of the other's life likes to know the loves, the adventures, the comedies and the tragedies that it contains. And, to have an advantage to draw your attention, I shall narrate the personal rather than the public life of my subjects.

He, of whom I write was a large man, for mind is the man. His eyes shone with intelligence for his head was full of intelligence. He was singularly handsome, or Gilbert Stuart made him so; and he was even more handsome in the portrait of himself by himself. He knew many things, indeed, he knew almost everything. And what he knew he was disposed to fully let everybody else know.

She, of whom I write, had bright eyes and sharp features, the outward indicative of the inward, quick perception and accurate conclusion. Her pleasing personality, Gilbert Stuart has truthfully put in a portrait. She had the womanly graces. Besides she had the practical side and in the affairs of business was equal to a man. Nevertheless, she did not wield the club of Hercules; neither did she "invade the privileges" of the sterner sex. (Dr. Goldsmith).

He and she were husband and wife.



DR. WILLIAM THORNTON  
By Gilbert Stuart

The Society of Friends in England had a settlement of their sect in the West Indies. For many decades are records of their meetings.<sup>1</sup> The meetings were monthly and held at the Fat Hog Meeting House at Tortola of the Virgin Isles. Of this settlement in the speck in the tropical waters were the Thorntons.

William Thornton was born May 27, 1761, on the little island Jost van Dyke in the West Indies. Concurrently it is not easy to recall historically the year 1761. On this side of the Atlantic, it was the first year after the Seven Years' War; on the other, it was eventful in the temporary fall of Pitt upon his bold encouragement of the seizure on the seas of the Spanish treasure from the Indies and of the occupation of Panama and attacking the Spanish dominions. He did not fall with the people for in their admiration of the "Great Commoner" they hung on to the spokes of his coach, hugged his footman and kissed his horses.

Mrs. Thornton thought Dr. Thornton's father's name was William, too; and she knew his mother's was Dorcas Downing Zeageus. At an early age William was sent to England and in Lancaster received rudimentary education. He lived there with his grandmother and Miss Jane and Miss Mary Thornton, his aunts, on the family estate, Green-Air. William had ancestors for when his grandmothers in the recitation of the genealogy arrived at *William the Conqueror*, he was generally sound asleep. He was coddled by his aunts and cared for by his uncle; association with affection made him affectionate.

William went down to London and lodged at Mr. Dicks, No. 7 King Street, Cheapside, London and for a time at 15 Norfolk Street, Strand, with the Honorable Thomas Thomasson, his stepfather.

<sup>1</sup>Minutes begin "the 1st day 9 mo, 1741—"

He was a student at the College of Edinburgh; entered perhaps in 1781. In the showcase in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress are exhibited his college cards. Other cards are:

Edin<sup>r</sup> Oct. 178(1)

Received 2<sup>sh</sup>6 from M<sup>r</sup> Thornton to Dues of Upper Janitor & Macer to the University.

And<sup>w</sup> Fyfe.

Lectures

on

Chemistry

Begun 31st October 1781

By J. Black

For Will<sup>m</sup> Thornton

Edin<sup>r</sup> Oct<sup>r</sup> 31, 1781

Anatomy

and

Surgery

No 555

A Monro

M<sup>r</sup> William Thornton

No

46

Royal Infirmary

Edinburgh

1<sup>st</sup> November 1782

M<sup>r</sup> Will. Thornton

Student

To continue in force one year

Arch<sup>d</sup>. Hope Jr.

Ale<sup>x</sup> Hunter P—



MRS. WILLIAM THORNTON.  
Water Color, by Dr. William Thornton.

Edin<sup>r</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> 1782

A

Course of Lectures  
on the  
Practice of Medicine  
by

John Brown, M. D.

For M<sup>r</sup> Wm. Thornton.

Mr. Wm. Thornton, a pupil at St. Bartholomew's Hospital for six months from the 1st day of Oct., 1783.

"The parchment degree, with its ponderous leaden seal, is among the Thornton papers in the J. Henley Smith collection, Library of Congress."—*A History of the National Capital*, W. B. Bryan.

Young Thornton at the University mixed with many like himself in other days to be so elevated the public could not fail to see them. And he could not have forgotten to have seen the hardy boy a little lame in his right leg who was more distinguished in the playgrounds than in the class, Walter Scott.

Recommending Thornton to a degree in medicine, Dr. John Walker, the Professor of Natural History in the College of Edinburgh, to Dr. George Skeen, Professor in Marichal College, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, November 10, 1784, writes:

"He has been all along, one of the most respectable Medical students in this place, has an excellent literary and public Spirit, and has been much noticed and regarded. He was elected a Member of the Antiquarian and Royal Medical Societies and one of the Presidents of our Society in the College of natural History."

It is true, as appears by a certificate dated Musæum Edinburgh, April 4, 1782, Thornton was elected a correspondent of the Society of the Antiquaries of Scot-

land on the motion of Sir John Dalrymple, H. M. Baronet, and the second of the Earl of Buchan, the first vice-president.

The Earl was an ardent antiquarian. John Clerk (Lord Eldin), a chum of Walter Scott, possessed by frankness and possessed of great genius, exercised his talent to please the antiquarians. He did it by manufacturing mutilated heads, which he buried in the ground to be accidentally discovered at a propitious hour and to be borne off with glee and honor by the antiquarians and added to the valuable accessions of their private museums. His father was especially a discriminating connoisseur and his museum was the most rich with these treasures of his son's genius. Showing one to the Earl of Buchan, that connoisseur, in his enthusiasm, carried it off to present to this same Society of Antiquaries. And it is still there to be admired.

A distinction there is between an antiquarian and a historian. Which is farther off the earth; as you want the reply, ask the antiquarian or the historian.

Thornton was a good penman. He could, if he so wished, make delicate lines, graceful curves and pretty flourishes, suggestive of our Spencerian system unfortunately falling into disuse. When a lad at school he handed his uncle two £5 notes and asked him to select the one the better engraved. The uncle selected the counterfeit just made by young Thornton.

Dr. Thornton continued his studies in Paris. A friendship arose with Countess de Beauharnais.<sup>2</sup> Her husband, the Count, was the uncle of Viscount de Beauharnais, the first husband of Josephine, who was the first wife of Napoleon, the Great.

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<sup>2</sup>Her maiden name was Marie Anne Francoise (commonly called Fanny) Mouchard.



Having been separated from her husband after a few years of marriage, the Countess devoted herself to her taste for letters and poetry and formed a *Salon*, where she brought together the men of letters and the scholars, amongst them were Dorat, Mably, Dussaulx, Cubrières, Bitaubé, etc. Good, clever, amiable, kind, artless in her elegance and unaffected, Fanny de Beauharnais was nevertheless very much abused by many of her contemporaries on account of her literary productions. . . . finally Ecouchard Lebrun, who wrote five epigrams against her, of which one of them as fine as cruel has become famous :

“Eglé, beautiful and poetess has two little bad habits;  
She makes (up) her face, and does not make her verses.”

The paragraph which precedes is in good French in the *dictionnaire* from which I quote it. After the list of scholars, Dorat and the others, the *etc.* is Dr. Thornton. The young Doctor worshipped at the shrine of beauty, elegance and gift. Of Fanny de Beauharnais, the Doctor painted a miniature. That fair ideas did flow from her to beguile him as he deftly blended the delicate colors, it is only to say.

Dr. Thornton was in Tortola (June 25, 1786) and that year came to the States. At first, early in 1787, he was in New York. Then he lived in Wilmington, Delaware; and to Delaware he took the oath of fidelity January 7, 1788. To his dear father and mother, in Quaker pronouns, he writes, April 14, 1788: “I applied to Governor Dickinson for permission to address his Daughter, but he thinks her too young by several years, and knows no objection whatever to me.”

At this period (1786-'90) the Doctor lived with Mrs. House in Fifth Street, corner of Market, Philadelphia. He surely must have been acquainted with Dolly Payne, when that was her name, and Dolly Todd.

when that was her name. He must also have been acquainted with James Madison, Jr., and the younger generation of the smart set.

In the handwriting of the Philosopher is :

"Dr. Franklin requests the favor of Dr. Thornton's Company at Dinner on Saturday next at 3 o'clock."

"Tues. 17, Feb. 1789."

Dr. Franklin was a patron of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Dr. Thornton was a member. The foundation for the new building was laid August 31, 1789. The plans were furnished by Dr. Thornton and over the front door in a niche was a statue of Dr. Franklin. In W. Birch and Son's drawings is the Library in Fifth Street across from Independence Square. The plans were adjudged the best in a competition and the award was a share of stock of the value of \$40.

"Mrs. Brodeau requests the favor of Dr. Thornton's company this afternoon to tea, she expects the pleasure of M<sup>rs</sup> Caldwell Craig's company, & as a further inducement promises him a tune on the harp from M. de la Neuville. Tuesday (1790.)"

M. E. Hyde de Neuville in the States had a haven until the storm in France cleared. Again, he came to the States, the second time as Minister. His direct diplomacy and delightful disposition and the sincere sociability of Mme. de Neuville made him and her popular to the limit.

Mrs. Brodeau had a boarding school for young ladies in Philadelphia at 2 Lodge Alley (west side of Second between Chesnut and Walnut, now Moravian Street). It so appears in the directories of 1791 and 1793. She had the encouragement of Dr. Benjamin Rush, who was the author of "Thoughts Upon Female Educa-



MRS. WILLIAM THORNTON  
By Gilbert Stuart

tion.” And it appears also that Mrs. Brodeau was of the select society of the Quaker stronghold.

Dr. William Thornton and Anna Maria, the daughter of Mrs. Brodeau, married, October 13, 1790.<sup>3</sup> The groom was twenty-nine, the bride, fifteen. The new-wedded went to Tortola, October 16, 1790. What the first letter of a new mother-in-law is like should interest:

*“My Dear Son,*

“Whatever grief the giving you that title may have cost me, be assured I glory in the name of mother to you. I hope I shall always have reason (to) exult in the appellation. I should not have wrote to you (so) soon as I can have nothing particular to say but to remind you of your promise to write me by every opportunity. Would not wish to impose a task on you, but hope the writing of your wife, to her mother will be rather a pleasure, particularly if she puts it in your power to speak well of her, which I hope will always be the case, permit me again to recommend her to your indulgent tenderness, give her as much of your society as you can, remember she is but a child & that it is only by being allow’d to profit by your conversation, that she can become a pleasing companion to you at all times. She has left a society that I flatter myself was pleasing to her, for your sake, do not let her feel the want of it by spending your time at a distance from her, for be well assured no society can make her amend for the loss of yours. Your friend Dr. Rush has predicted that you will make one of the best Husbands, for all our sakes don’t let him be a false prophet. Please to make most affectionate remembrances to Mr. Rivardy. I hope the voyage will have been of service to him, & if he will favor me with a few lines I shall think myself under great obligations to

<sup>3</sup>(1800 October) “Monday, 13th gloomy and rain.—I was married this day ten years—it then rained.—I hope we may be able to pass the next anniversary of it more agreeably.” Mrs. Thornton’s Journal.

him. Please make my best respects to your mother—father, &c.

I am your truly Affectionate  
Friend & Mother,

A. BRODEAU."

Thursday, Oct. 29, 1790.

You may suppose Love & Compt<sup>t</sup> from our poor diminished Society.

Dr. Thornton,  
Tortola.

With John Fitch, Dr. Thornton co-experimented in the perfecting of a steamboat.

*"My Dear Sir,*

"How I pity & lament the very severe affliction you must have experienced in the extreme illness of my beloved child. I feel most exquisitely for myself & you & wish I had been present to have mitigated your distress. My fears are not yet subsided tho' you assure me of her convalescence, as relapses are common & dangerous, & till I receive your next letter shall be miserable.—Your extreme & unequalled watchfulness & attention towards her evince the goodness of your heart as well as the love you bear her & attaches me to you by the ties of gratitude as well as the sincerest affection. The thankful acknowledgments of a heart alive to the sentiments of the most lively gratitude, are due to your revered mother for her kind & truly maternal attention & to your father-in-law for his tender compassion & distress. I hope they will be amply compensated by the dutiful & affection(ate) attentions of their recovered daughter-in-law I expect she is blest with gratitude enough to think she can never do enough for persons to whom she is connected by so many endearing ties. I am likewise much concern'd for your health, my Dear Sir, I earnestly hope that your watching may not have brought illness on you as you mention some slight complaints & that you may never have occasion to call forth a proof of Anna's reciprocal tenderness by a fit of sickness on your part. I hope you will

be very careful of both your healths that I may have the only satisfaction I can enjoy in this world, that seeing you both return in peace & happiness. I am glad scales &c were such as you wished, by this opportunity of Cap<sup>t</sup> Brewster I hope you will receive a brass mortar suitable for your purpose with the skins for the painting. I suppose you mean to take your own Portrait as well as Anna's. I wish success to that undertaking as well as to every other in which you may be concerned.

"Your request with respect to the steamboat shall be granted—as I had not heard it mentioned since your departure, I went myself to see where it was, with difficulty I found it, it appeared to me in a very shattered condition, the new boat by the side without the least improvement & I suppose not the better for having been fixed in the ice all winter. in my inquiries for the Boat I heard Mr Fitch was return<sup>d</sup>. I found him intending to procure all the intelligence he could concerning it for your satisfaction. He has wrote you the particulars which you will receive with this. From his letter which he brought open with a view to my perusal, I find that you are the vivifying spark that gives life & animation to the steam boat, while you appear'd to abandon it, it remained in an inactive torpor, but your influence will now give it motion & if it ever arrives in the salutary climate of the Mississippi it may acquire additional vigor. I sent to Mr Stockton to let him know of this opportunity but as Mr Fitch says he may be too lazy to write as well as to act, Mr Wells is not in town, but I have seen Mr Brooks & told him your intentions, & suppose I shall be call'd on when Mr Wells returns, but it may be a month or six weeks before I shall be able to pay the money, but you need be under no apprehensions concerning it, as I shall make it a matter of conscience to fulfill your engagements.

"The mortar has been sent home & I am quite mortified to see such a clumsy, rough, ugly thing. I have sent it back to be polished, but I am sure they can never make it such a one as you will expect to see. My comp<sup>ts</sup>. to M. Rivardy. I am much obliged to him for his kind intention, but am sorry

he should object to send his letters because in two languages to be sure if he had written it in the learned languages I should have been obliged to seek an interpreter, but as it was there could be no reason for with-holding what would have given me pleasure. I think myself much obliged for his kind attention & hope next time he makes the attempt it will be less study.

"Please to give my best compliments to your Brother with many thanks for the kind interest he takes in the health & welfare of one so dear to us both & may her health be perfectly reestablished & your happiness in each other always continue is the earnest & hourly prayers of one who is, in all sincerity

Your most affectionately  
devoted Mother

A. BRODEAU."

May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1791."

*My Dear Sir,*

By Mr. Hennessy you will receive this to whom in compliance with your request I should have been very happy to have shown all the civility possible, but he would not avail himself of the general invitation I gave him, neither of all the particular ones. I invited several of my young friends that he might see some of the Phil<sup>a</sup>. Ladies, with whom he appeared well pleased. I made other invitations afterwards on his account but he pleaded engagements & I have not been able to be civil to him as I wished, he appears an intelligent young man, but too diffident to be perfectly at his ease among so many girls, and as he supposed he should find others at my house, he did not find it agreeable to come.

I heard that Mr. Voights was making a model of the steam boat that it was finished and was to be sent into the company next day so thought I would go & see it, but to my surprise when I came there the model was of a horse boat, to be worked with four horses within side which are to turn a wheel in the middle of the boat, that wheel

to operate on paddles at the end of the Boat like a steam boat. M<sup>r</sup> Matlach was examining it at the time I went & said that it appeared to him constructed on a better plan & seem'd more add<sup>e</sup>quate to the purpose of navigating the Mississippi than any he had yet seen, some of the assembly were to see it with a view to get a patent, to me there appears many inconveniences, if it is meant simply for passengers. Four horses & forage for them, will take a great deal of room & be disagreeable companions, & it cannot be meant to carry merchandise as the boat is to consist of two linked together & the depth of water to be no greater than that of a canoe. From the foregoing I suppose you will guess the fate of the Steam Boat. I told him who I was & asked him to give me an account of the steam boat as I was going to write to you & wished you to be informed how they were going on, & I did not know where to find M<sup>r</sup>. Fitch, he gave me a long account of their proceedings, but told me if I would inclose it to you he would write an ample account of it, for it was a shame that gentlemen who had contributed their money & were absent should be imposed on, so I shall say no more, as I expect to get the account from him to inclose in this.

Since I wrote last I heard that your friend Count Andriani was gone to lake Champlain & was getting a vessel constructed with a view to the navigation of that lake. I hear he has discredit(ed) himself in the minds of many people here who had treated him with the greatest deference, by having written as they say to some friends in Europe a very unjust & degrading account of the people of America with some things disrespectful of Gen. W. which letter were put into the hands of Col. Humphreys, resident in Portugal who, they say, has transmitted copies to Gen. W. & it is thought if he attempts to visit Phil<sup>a</sup>. again he will meet with a very different reception, & they say an absolute refusal of admission to the presence of Gen: W: they complain much of his supercilious & contemptuous behaviour to people in general as if he supposed himself of a superior order of beings, his Plan for the building of a meeting-house



has never been put in execution nor ever will I imagine. I think I told you in my last of the opposition the Players had met with in their design to purchase a lot of Mr Bingham's & again of one in the neighborhood belonging to Palatiah Webster, but I hear they have succeeded at last & bought one of a Quaker Preacher of your acquaintance, they got a third person to negotiate for the lot & he succeeded they were to pay £6000 for it, it was no sooner known that it was for the players than Mr John Dickinson of Wilmington<sup>ton</sup> (for that was the man) was pestered with remonstrances from all the persons in the neighborhood, Mr Phil: Dickinson, Mr Laurence Mr Climer & several others who thought they should be contaminated by having a play house in their neighborhood & they say he is yet struggling between interest & fame the deeds not being absolutely signed when the remonstrance arrived, it is supposed that avarice will triumph as it is not likely that any other person will give so great a price, the lot is joining his own house the corner of Chestnut & Sixth streets.

The date of your last letter is the 10<sup>th</sup> of August which is almost two months & if I do not hear every month or five weeks I am almost in despair, I was happy by that letter to hear that you & Anna were well & that she was in such good spirits. I hope they will continue & that I shall have ocular demonstration of it in the Spring, if I had not that hope life would be (a) burden that I should be glad to through down. My best respects attend your kind relations & I am with every sentiment of affection

& esteem your devoted Mother

A BRODEAU.

Philadelphia Sunday Oct 2<sup>d</sup> 1791"

It is said that Dr. Thornton and Count Andriani, a naturalist, traveled in company in Europe. The Count, on this continent, mailed a message to "my very dear friend," the Doctor, from New York, July 2, 1790. To the disparagement by the Count to American appertaining, communicated by Col. Humphreys,



MRS. ANN BRODEAU.

London, October 31st, 1790, General Washington writes:

TO DAVID HUMPHREYS.

PHILADELPHIA, 16 MARCH, 1791.

*"My Dear Sir,*

\* \* \*

"The remarks of a foreign Count are such as do no credit to his judgment, and as little to his heart. They are the superficial observations of a few months residence, and an insult to the inhabitants of a country, where he has received more attention and courtesy than he seems to merit."

Dr. and Mrs. Thornton returned two weeks before the stated date, November 16, 1792. Mrs. Brodeau had a furnished house in readiness for them; the furnishings cost \$2219; and the house was 159 Chestnut Street. Here the family of three lived for six months and after for two years in the directory "in Callowhill Street near the Ridge Road" but out of the directory known as Mud Hill.

The Commissioners for the Federal City had March 14, 1792, advertised for competitive plans for the Capitol and the President's House. That of James Hoban for the President's House was acceptable and accepted. The numerous plans for the Capitol were none unobjectionable; some had merit; some were utterly lacking; some grotesque. From Tortola, October, 1792, came the request of Dr. Thornton for permission to submit drawings under the first advertisement.

And the sequent communication is:

GEORGE TOWN NOV<sup>r</sup>. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1792.

*Sir,*

Yr favor of the 9<sup>th</sup> Instant came to my hands by the last post—The Commissioners had received yours from Tortola—They will meet on the first of next Month—but do not expect M<sup>r</sup> Johnson will be present at that time—We shall be glad

however to receive your plan for the Capitol, & wish you may find a convenient opportunity of forwarding it to us by the 1<sup>st</sup> of next Month—A choice has been made for the Presidents House—When we have a full Board & take into consideration again the subject of the Capitol you will hear from us what may occur, & you will then judge whether to pay us a visit on that subject—please to present my compliments to Judge Turner—I hope he received the letter written to him by Mr. Orr, member of Congress from Kentucky—It gives me pleasure to have the occasion of assuring you that I am with esteem,

Sir,

Yr most ob Hble Serv<sup>t</sup>

DAN<sup>l</sup>. CARROLL

On December 4, (1792) the Commissioners to Thornton spoke well of the plan and the President, Philadelphia, March 3, 1793, writes:

“Grandeur Simplicity and Convenience, appear to be so well Combined in this plan of Doctor Thornton’s, that I have no doubt of its meeting that approbation from you, which I have given it upon an attentive inspection, and which it has received from all those who have seen it and are considered Judges of such things.”

Dr. Thornton made his first visit to Washington early in March, 1793. He came with a letter of introduction, dated the 3d. of that month, from the President.<sup>4</sup>

GEORGETOWN, APRIL 5, 1793.

Sir: The President has given his formal approbation of your plan. You will therefore be pleased to grant powers or put the business in a way to be closed on the acknowledgments of your success entitle you.

“As soon as the nature of the work and your convenience will permit, we wish to be in possession of your explanations

<sup>4</sup>A History of the National Capital, W. B. Bryan.

with the plan, for we wish to mark out the ground, make preparations, and even lay out the foundations this fall.

We are, etc,

T. JOHNSON

D<sup>d</sup>. STUART

DAN<sup>l</sup>. CARROLL

D<sup>r</sup> Wm. Thornton, Philadelphia.

The prize was \$500 and a lot of the value of £100. Dr. Thornton declined the superintendence because of the requirement of time. I understand the drawings were made in Tortola. Glenn Brown, the local architect and the author of the superb "History of the United States Capitol," is the authority that the Thornton scheme "forms the nucleus of the present structure." I take it the original plan was not essentially changed.

Upon the acceptance of the plan, Dr. Thornton "threw out an idea" that a figure of Columbus ornament the eastern plaza of the Capitol grounds. The idea was pleasing, but it did not come to more than a mental image in the time of the Doctor.

"The President of the United States is much obliged by Doct<sup>r</sup>. Thornton's polite attentions and prays him to accept his thanks for the Treatise on the Elements of written language.

The President is sorry to hear of the Doctors indisposition.—A speedy and perfect recovery is wished.

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June

1793."

"Th: Jefferson, with his compliments to D<sup>r</sup>. Thornton returns him many thanks for the device of the Mace; & still more for his dissertation on the elements of language which he had read in manuscript with great satisfaction, but shall do it with more in print.

June 11. 93."

The work is almost sufficiently described on the published title page:

Prize Dissertation

which was honored with the Magellanic Gold Medal, by the American Philosophical Society, January, 1793.

Cadmus:

or, a

Treatise on the Elements

of

Written Language.

\* \* \*

With an Essay on the mode of teaching the Surd or Deaf, and consequently Dumb, to speak

By William Thornton, M. D.

Member of the Societies of Scots Antiquaries of Edinburgh and Perth; the Medical Society, and the Society of Natural History of Edin: The American Philosophical Society &c.

Philadelphia:

Printed by R. Aitkin & Son, No 22 Market Street

MDCCXCIII.

The work was written in Tortola. It came a little late for the competition, but Dr. David Rittenhouse, the celebrated astronomer, the president of the society, advocated the acceptance and award. But this is his letter:

Feb. 13 1793.

“To the Author of the paper signed Cadmus

Sir

A meeting of the officers of the Society on friday next will afford an opportunity of determining whether from the circumstances & time of its being presented it can properly come under consideration for the premium this present year. I shall support the affirmation if you think proper to

leave it with me until then. I have perused it with much satisfaction & wish it success most sincerely

Your very humble servant,

D RITTENHOUSE

Wednesday Evening

Glenn Brown says of the mace it was for the State of Virginia and that "he used the rattlesnake as the principal feature because it is peculiarly American, is peaceful until hurt or aroused for self-defense, and only strikes after giving warning.

Gen. Washington to Dr. Thornton, December 3, 1793.

"I have been duly favored with your letter of the 29th ult. and thank you for your obliging offer to supply the office lately occupied by Mr. Lear. I am persuaded it would have been ably filled with your abilities, but previous to the departure of that gentleman, my arrangements were made in favor of Mr. Dandridge, who is now in the exercise of the office of private secretary."

GEN. WASHINGTON TO TOBIAS LEAR.

GERMAN TOWN.

28th. Augt. 1794.

Dear Sir,

\* \* \* I pray you to let me know, as far as you may be able to discover, in how respectable a light Doctor Thornton stands, or would be considered by the Proprietors of the Federal City (amongst whom he spent some time in the month of July last). The Doctor is sensible, and indefatigable I am told, in the execution of whatever he engages;—To which may be added his taste for architecture, but being little known doubts arise on that head."

Dr. Thornton was appointed a Commissioner September 2, 1794. His colleagues at the appointment-time were Gustavus Scott and Alexander White. And acknowledging again Mr. Brown, is given his observation that the records of the commission from his

coming were more orderly kept; and, his opinion, that the building regulations promulgated, July 20, 1795, were of the Doctor's framing.

He, with the other Commissioners, recommended to the President an appropriation for a National University on an extended plan to be within the reservation of nineteen acres to the west of squares 60, 61, 62, and 63, at the time set apart for a fort and barracks and subsequently for an observatory (July 9 and November 18, 1796).

Maj. L'Enfant's tentative plan had more "radial" streets or avenues than the permanent has. Wisely, President Washington used the blue pencil. Wise, because less diminutive *squares* are made by convergence of thoroughfares to be cut up and used so that unsightly sheds and fences back on street fronts or adjoin a front door. The wisdom of Dr. Thornton is shown in his antagonism to the assignment of these small spaces to the proprietors. Notwithstanding the approval of his contention by General Washington, he lost; the two other Commissioners favored the proprietors.

CITY OF WASHINGTON, May 31 1799.

Sir:

"Finding that the Board of Commissioners were exceedingly urged by Mr. George Walker to lay off and divide certain small portions of ground within the lines of his property, between the intersection of various avenues and streets, which do not appear in the general plan of the city to have ever been designed for private occupancy, and perceiving the Board were disposed to adopt the proposal, I declared the measure expressly contrary to the intention of the late President of the United States, and accordingly wrote a formal protest, setting forth the injury that the city would sustain by admitting a principle which would induce every proprietor to make similar claims, and requested that the



Board would not sanction the divisions, by signature, until the opinion of the late President should be fully known, if any hesitation remained on the minds of my colleagues, after the perusal of your letters of the 26th of December, 1796, and the 27th of February, 1797. Those letters explain clearly, in my opinion, the sentiments I have repeatedly heard you express; but lest your opinion may be misconstrued, in a point so essential to the future benefit of the city, I request you will pardon me for making so free as to solicit a further declaration of your former opinions if they can be more explicit.

"There is, perhaps, one point that may be considered to be omitted. I mean the declarations of those portions as appropriations; for although many of them are very small, not containing a standard lot, and, if occupied by private individuals, might justly be considered nuisances; yet if appropriated to the public use, they would not only be highly useful, but also ornamental, as they would serve for churches, temples, infirmaries, public academies, dispensaries, markets, public walks, fountains, statues, obelisks, etc., and if the whole were to be paid for as appropriations, they amount to only 381,683 square feet, or eight acres, at £25, making £200. The only doubt remaining in the minds of the Commissioners relative to these portions of ground, was the power of non-insertion, but it appears to me that their not having been inserted leaves them exactly in the same predicament as the other portions of the city intended for appropriations, but neither yet expressly designated as appropriations, nor even as reservations. They may be considered as reservations, because the points of squares have been cut off, and these latter therefore, are rendered by your declaration of 26th of December, 1796, subject to payment, and consequently to public appropriation.

"If no objection can be made to this, which, indeed, is warranted by the deeds of trust, surely less validity must be given to objections against the adoption of areas, heretofore considered only as streets, which, by adoption, will be paid for and rendered highly useful and ornamental. If any

objection can arise, it has been justly observed in your letter last quoted that they might with equal propriety ask payment for streets, for these spaces differ in nothing from the avenues but in extent, and every avenue might, by parity of claim, be reduced to a street or be charged to the public. No individual has ever contended for the insertion of these irregular portions, except Mr. George Walker, but the principle being admitted, the right will be universally claimed. Many have sold lots fronting on open spaces; the map of the city has been published without them, and complaints of injustice will certainly be made by persons who have purchased, if these spaces be filled up by private lots, besides, these insertions not accompanying the maps now dispersed, strangers might be liable to continual impositions by purchasing lots apparently on open areas on the map, but in reality only fronting stables or greater nuisances, for these lots are too small to admit of houses all round and conveniences within; so that it appears not only against the plan of the city to insert them (unless for public appropriations, which I should advocate), but it would be highly unjust to individuals, as well those who may purchase, as those who become proprietors, and it would materially injure the convenience of the city by occupying for private purposes those places so easy of access and so necessary for the public.

I have the honor to be, sir, with sincere regard, your very respectful friend, etc.,

WILLIAM THORNTON.

General Washington.

FEDERAL CITY, June 1, 1799.

Sir:

In replying to your letter of yesterday's date, I must beg leave to premise that when I left the chair of government it was with a determination not to intermeddle in any public matter which did not immediately concern me, and that I have felt no disposition since to alter this determination. But as you have requested that I would give you my ideas on a certain point which seems to have occupied the

attention of the Board of Commissioners, and on which I presume my letters to that body (whilst I had the honor to administer the Government) have not been so clear and explicit as it was my intention to be, I have no hesitation in declaring (unless I have entirely forgotten all recollection of the fact) that it has always been my invariable opinion, and remain still to be so, that no departure from the engraved plan of the city ought to be allowed, unless imperious necessity should require it, or some great public good is to be promoted thereby. Minor considerations contribute to this opinion, but the primary and to my mind unanswerable one, is, that after the original plan (with some alterations) had been adopted, ordered to be engraved, and published, and was transmitted to several, if not to all our public agents abroad, for the purpose of inviting purchasers, it would, for reasons too obvious and cogent to require illustration, be deceptions to lay off lots for private purposes, where none appeared in a plan which was intended to inform, aid, and direct the judgment of foreigners and others, who could not, on the premises, make a choice.

It is not difficult to form an opinion of the way of thinking and views of others by one's own, under similar circumstances, I declare then, without reserve, that if I had made choice of a site for a house on open area in the published map, occasioned by the intersection of the avenues, and an angle thereof should afterward be filled up in a manner I might not approve, I should not scruple to complain of both the deception and injury.

But I am straying from my purpose, which was no more than simply to say (if I am not, as before mentioned, greatly forgetful), that I have never had but one opinion on this subject, and that is, that nothing ought to justify a departure from the engraved plan, but the probability of some great public benefit, or unavoidable necessity.

With great esteem and regard, I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

William Thornton, Esq.

Dr. Thornton, with the other Commissioners, successfully negotiated loans with the Bank of Columbia, in Georgetown, for the completion of the public buildings and to continue other public improvements. With the letter of Scott and Thornton, dated October 16, 1799, in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, is this:

COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE, 19<sup>th</sup>: May 1802

*Gentlemen*

In consequence of not observing the Time when our Note in Bank would become due, we did not renew it on the last Day of your meeting, & have to request the Indulgence of your accepting the note we have now drawn.—The Discount you will please to debit our Deposit with.—

As we suppose this will be the last note which, as a Board we shall present to the Bank, we think it proper to tender to you our acknowledgments for the liberality we have always experienced from you.—

We are Gentlemen  
with great respect y<sup>r</sup>. &c

WILLIAM THORNTON—  
ALEX WHITE  
TRISTAM DALTON

President & Directors  
of the Bank of Columbia

Dr. Thornton located in Georgetown. Georgetown was no longer in Maryland, yet somewhere it was; so the Doctor sometimes began his letter: "George Town, Columbia," other times, "George Town, Potomac"—January 21, 1795. "Wm. Thornton offers for sale the brick house opposite the Bank of Columbia lately occupied by the subscriber (now removed to the city of Washington)" *Centinel of Liberty*, March 17, 1797. The house is described by the Doctor in another advertisement, as containing four rooms, one eighteen by twenty feet, three guest rooms, a kitchen and back



RESIDENCE OF DR. WILLIAM THORNTON.  
3221 Bridge Street.

building with three rooms. It is on the north side of M street and numbered 3221. M street, heretofore called Bridge street, was, in the Doctor's time, Falls street. From Samuel Blodget, July 9, 1796, as tenant, he took possession of lot 7 in square 253 and from him, afterwards, as owner. Here he lived until he lived no more. The site is 1331 F street.

Nowadays those who have it easy in the city, look for trouble in the country and they think themselves especially equipped

"To plough, to plant, to reap, to sow."—Chaucer.

Dr. Thornton acquired a country seat on either side of the Frederick town road, 573 A, and called it Park Grove; and he wrote to General Washington: "I know as a farmer." With his vaunt of farmer-knowledge were his thanks for the three scaly barked hickories. "As soon as I got the Trees, I planted them myself with great care, for I value them as Trees, but a thousand times more as your Gift."—March 18, 1799. The Doctor's farm dwelling was on the site where is that of M. Willson Offutt, Esq., at Bethesda, Maryland. It was frame, one and a half stories, two rooms on lower floor, one on upper.

The Doctor had a city garden at the southeast corner of New York avenue and Eighteenth street, opposite The Octagon, twelve original lots (square 171, lots 1 to 5, 15 to 21) for buckwheat and other table supplies.

Dr. Thornton was a keeper of sheep as well as tiller of the ground. The bleating of the sheep was music to his ears, but whether their product filled his purse is to be doubted. Other public men had the merino mania. Mr. Jefferson and Dr. Thornton improved their folds by correspondence. Chief Justice Cranch had his farm near Alexandria. The Judge and the

Doctor in partnership raised sheep (1810) and the Judge's father reported the witticism of the elder Adams:

"Your uncle, the late president, desired me to send his love to you, and hopes that your attention to your sheep will not take off your mind from the woolsack."

Dr. Thornton was an ardent abolitionist. In Tortola he presented a petition which begins:

"February 22, 1791.

To the honorable the President and Members of the Council of the Virgin Islands.—

Conceiving it to be my Duty to attend to a particular Call of Humanity which leads me to attempt a settlement of free People at Sierra Leona in Africa and finding some European Nations, as also America desirous of forming such an Establishment."

He carried on a correspondence with like champions in England and particularly with the Society of the Friends of the Blacks (*Société des amis des noirs*), of which Jacques Pierre Brissot was president, and Clavière, Mirabeau, La Fayette and Volney were members. Dr. Thornton was a strong supporter of the American Colonization Society. It is true that in 1795 he bought Joseph and Joe, negroes, with a warranty of soundness, but that was different—it was to give them a home on the farm.

The Doctor was in Philadelphia and received from the President's private secretary:

"B<sup>a</sup>. Dandridge presents compliments to Doct<sup>r</sup> Thornton & by the Presidents direction asks the pleasure of his company at tea this Evening 7 o'Clock in a *family way*.

"Monday, 30 Mar." (1795)

General Washington in a game of billiards stopped his play to laugh at the Doctor's poetic shot. The Doc-

tor asked the General how far a cannon, a term in billiards, would carry, for on the heights of Dover is a very long cannon called Queen Anne's Pocket Pistol, inscribed

"Charge me well and keep me clean  
I'll carry o'er to Calais Green."

As it is twenty-one miles over, the General laughingly observed, "Upon my word, Doctor, that would be a very long shot."

Dr. Thornton was proud of the intimacy with General Washington, of his confidence in his integrity and regard for his ability.

Dr. Thornton made the plans and supervised the building of the two residences on North Capitol Street for General Washington. From the General on the 8th of December, 1799, antedating his death six days, he received the thirty-fourth letter.

To General Marshall,<sup>5</sup> M. H. R., Philadelphia, January 2, 1800, he expressed the hope that the remains would be placed "in the Center of that national Temple which he approved of for the Capitol"; and "Here, in the center of the intended Dome is the point from which we calculate our Longitudes &c. for here I presume the Congress mean to place the Body of the beloved & lamented Chief."

Dr. Thornton first proposed a Washington Monument. Among his private papers is the plan—U. S. Capitol, Glenn Brown.

The Doctor voted in Bladensburgh, 1800, for the Presidential electors.

The Doctor's traits were strong. He was hospitable. His hospitality was one hundred per cent. It had no alloy of selfishness. He did not wait the coming

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<sup>5</sup>The Chief Justice.



guest. He ran to meet him. To M. Volney, the French traveler, he quickly writes:

George Town, Dec 15<sup>th</sup>, 1795.

"I will first congratulate you on your safe arrival in America; then felicitate my Country on having you in its bosom."

M. Volney replied promptly, January 9, 1796, and came along promptly with a letter from James Madison, Jr., to the Doctor, Philadelphia, May 5, 1796:

"He is on a ramble southwardly & will make your nascent metropolis a resting place of his observations for a few days."

Many are the letters from M. Volney to the Doctor. He was Comte Constantin François de Chasseboeuf de Volney; but economically he signed C. Volney.

"Phila<sup>d</sup> May 29, 1804

"William Thornton, M. D.

Washington

D Sir M<sup>r</sup> Peale D Fothergill & D Collins, with the famous traveller Humboldt & two of his Companions de Voyage visit your city.

JN<sup>o</sup> VAUGHAN.

The eminent explorer to the Doctor acknowledged "You and your charming wife have heaped with kindness during my sojourn at Washington."

*"Mon respectable ami*

\* \* \* J'ai lu à Lancaster Notre memoire sur les Esclaves et Votre Cadmus, le premier fait autant d'honneur a Votre sensibilité que le second est rempli d'idées neuves et ingénieuses. Le célèbre Darwin a traité récemment (1804) ce même sujet des lettres et des sont son Poème the Temple of Nature (V. additional Notes) mais Votre Système est bien plus simple que le sien.

HUMBOLDT

Philadelphie ce 20 Juin 1804

Said again the Baron—always in French—

“You are the most obliging, the most serviceable, the most amiable of all men. *Helas!* that I have caused you so much trouble. \* \* \*

Mon respectable ami  
v. t. h. et t. ob

HUMBOLDT

à Philadelphie  
ce 27 Juin  
1804

Please give my regards to the friendly Mrs. Thornton and to her mother. Offer my modest thanks to Mr. Merry who was kind to me and especially to Mr. Madison to whom I shall be strongly attached.”

Mrs. Merry, the British Minister’s wife to Tom Moore, the poet, says: “Mr. Thornton was indefatigable in his endeavors to procure us every comfort. He is *quiet*, sensible, well-informed man, without brilliancy, or elocution. Well educated and full of information, which he details slowly from a natural impediment in his speech.”

I am not taking the opportunity for elaboration. I simply compare the Doctor’s enthusiasm to an overflowing fountain. Here is what Oliver Wolcott on Independence Day, 1800, tells his wife about it.

“There appears to be a confident expectation that this place will soon exceed any in the world. Mr. Thornton, one of the Commissioners, spoke of a population of 160,000 people, as a matter of course, in a few years. No stranger can be here a day and converse with the proprietors, without conceiving himself in the company of crazy people. Their ignorance of the rest of the world, and their delusions with respect to their own prospects, are without parallel.”

Dr. Thornton’s optimism in the fire insurance company he organized in 1801 is to be observed. Its title

was Washington Association, and United States Insurance Company. Its capital was \$2,000,000, proposed of course, one half payable in city lots. From the prospectus of the President, the Doctor, is the sentence: "It would be superfluous to point out the utility of promoting a security against losses, to which every one is liable, and by which many now wander in misery without homes." The sign on the office opposite the U. S. Treasury was soon taken down—(*National Intelligence*, August 31, 1801.)

The Doctor knew it was necessary to provide for the material that the mental and moral might be maintained and he proposed a meeting of subscribers "for the erection of A Market House near the Hotel Bridge and Pennsylvania avenue. It is the site of the Center Market.

*National Intelligencer*,

WASHINGTON, July 15, 1801.

At a meeting this day at Mr. Rhodes's Hotel, of several of the subscribers to a MARKET, to be built on Pennsylvania Avenue, agreeably to advertisement, the following resolutions were adopted, viz.:

1st. That Edward Eno be authorized to collect the subscriptions.

2d. That William Brent be appointed Treasurer.

3d. That James Hoban and Clotworthy Stephenson be appointed a committee to carry into execution the building according to a specification and plan left at the Commissioners Office.

W. THORNTON

In behalf and at the request of the subscribers

It is to add illustration of the Doctor's Sellerian dreams to take a sentence from his prospectus of The North Carolina Gold Mine Company: (Stanley County).

"If the returns of gold be such as I now contemplate; I doubt not that every share will sell in a short time for many hundreds per cent. in advance."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Thornton's partiality was such that in intervals of health he praised the salubrity of the Washington climate. He rushed to the desk when he heard Mr. Madison was appointed Secretary of State and this to him he wrote:

"The President, whose tender regard for you makes him always speak with an uncommon degree of Interest for your welfare informed me that you had long experienced delicate Health, and he even feared a change of climate might finally be requisite. I do not think I ever enjoyed such Health as since my residence in this place, and I sincerely hope that even this Change from your present situation may be so favorable, that you will have cause to pronounce it one of the healthiest places in the world."

Dr. Thornton was the self-constituted chairman of the committee on public comfort, he was all of the committee. Dr. and Mrs. Thornton made a welcoming visit to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel H. Smith, bride and groom, at Stelle's, October 24, 1800, and not many days thereafter the new couple established themselves as housekeepers in one of the Ten Buildings on New Jersey avenue between D and E street, southeast; and Mr. Smith opened there a printing office and began the publication of the *National Intelligencer*.<sup>7</sup>

"Dr. T. invited him to lodge with us."<sup>8</sup> Him is General John Marshall and the time of invitation, June 9, 1800. The General, who was to be the Chief Justice, reserved his decision until the twenty-fifth. "He con-

<sup>6</sup>In the document, February 6, 1806, are the autographs of the trustees, Daniel Carroll, of Duddington, Philip B. Key, Thomas Peter, John Tayloe, Thomas Tingey and John Weems, M. D.

<sup>7</sup>A History of the National Capital, W. B. Bryan.

<sup>8</sup>Diary of Mrs. Thornton.

cluded to take a house, as he thought his family of servants wou'd make it disagreeable to us''<sup>8</sup> He got a residence for Mr. Madison and as it was in course of completion he could have it arranged to Mr. Madison's requirements. The wine cellar was enlarged. The Madisons and Thorntons were next door neighbors for eight years and it was daily visiting. When the Madisons moved into the President's House, the Thorntons bought their dining room furniture and continued to eat at the same table.

Dr. Thornton was over sensitive. This trait made him suspicious and jealous and he saw slights not intended and took umbrage at trivialities. Letters to this proof I will not quote, but the amiable Mrs. Madison quite frequently reassured him.

Dr. Thornton, although armed with a degree to deal with disease never did any more harm than the gentle Dr. Goldsmith.<sup>9</sup> With both it was a polished handle to their names. And indeed to "Benj<sup>n</sup> Stoddert Esq: Secy of the Naval Dept of the U. S. at Phil<sup>a</sup>, June 28, 1798," he admits:

"It might indeed appear surprising, that a person educated a Physician, should presume to instruct a Soldier in the art of killing unless it were recollected that a modern Esculapius kills more than a modern Mars."

The Doctor had with assiduity for four years pursued the medical courses and could not doubt his own skill but he may have doubted his ability to catch that psychological moment to present his bill when the patient about reaching the goal of restoration recognizes with gratitude the physician's skill, for when the patient passes that moment he rather thinks the restora-

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<sup>8</sup>"Dr. T. does not practice Physic but could not refuse to go,"  
Diary of Mrs. Thornton, June 3, 1800.

tion was less from skill of the physician and more from his merited favor with Providence.

Dr. Thornton was an artist. His miniatures are the limit of skill. His still-lives are correct counterfeits. He limned the features of Washington, of Jefferson, of Dolly Madison, of himself and of his wife.

What his pupillage as an artist was, I know not, save the suggestion of the card:

“Monday 19 Day of Jany 1784.

Admit to the Lecture this Evening

Mr. Thornton

Royal Academy London

V: Green R A.

Gilbert Stuart painted three portraits of Thomas Jefferson. Two were executed in the city of Washington, and of these two, is the famous profile in monochrome. Jefferson writes to Joseph Delaphine, in 1813, that it is “in water color”; and six years later, to General Dearborn that Stuart did it “on paper with crayon.” Dr. Thornton who copied it calls it “a drawing.” The Doctor’s copy is owned by Fred. B. McGuire, Esq. General Kosciuszko attempted a portrait of Jefferson and Dr. Thornton, July 20, 1816, writes:

“Never was such injustice done to you except by sign painters and General Kosciuszko, than which last nothing can be so bad, and when I saw it I did not wonder that he lost Poland—not that it is necessary that a general should be a painter, but he should be a man of such sense as to discover he is not a painter.”<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Thornton was a self-instructed architect. Autobiographically says he, October 12, 1802:

“I saw a publication for a plan of a public library in Philadelphia offering a premium for the best.

“When I trevelled I never thought of architecture. But

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<sup>10</sup>The *Washington Times*, September 15, 1901.

I got some books and worked a few days, then gave a plan in the ancient Ionic order, which carried the day.

"The president and secretary of state published a premium of a gold medal of \$500 and a lot for a house in the city of Washington for the best plan and elevation of a capitol of the United States. I lamented not having studied architecture, and resolved to attempt the grand undertaking and study at the same time. I studied some months and worked almost night and day, but I found I was opposed by regular architects from France and various other countries."

The examples of Dr. Thornton's architecture within the District of Columbia are The Octagon, Tudor Place and Brentwood. He planned a church for Bishop John Carroll in 1800 to be built in Baltimore. The historic Octagon, built by John Tayloe, the temporary Executive Mansion in Madison's administration, is the admiration of architects and the permanent home of their institute. Montpelier with the Thornton modifications is of the most perfectly proportioned country homes in the land. He gave Mr. Laurence Lewis, the husband of Nelly Custis, the plan for Woodlawn near Mount Vernon.<sup>11</sup>

That Dr. Thornton designed the University of Virginia has the evidence of Mr. Jefferson's letter enclosing his own preliminary sketch of the grounds.

"Monticello May 9, 17

*Dear Sir*

"We are commencing here the establishment of a college, and instead of building a magnificent house which would exhaust all our funds, we propose to lay off a square of about 7. or 800. f. on the outside of which we shall arrange separate pavilions, one for each professor and his scholars.

\* \* \*

"Will you set your imagination to work and sketch some

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<sup>11</sup>Diary of Mrs. Thornton, August 4, 1800.

designs for us no matter how loosely with the pen, without the trouble of referring to scale or rule; for we want nothing but the outline of the architecture, as the internal must be arranged according to local convenience, a few sketches such as need not take you a moment will greatly oblige us.

\* \* \*

"I salute you with friendship and respect."

Dr. Thornton was an author. His novels he did not entrust to publishers. His "Outlines of a Constitution for United North and South Columbia," proposed a grand government for the two continents with the capital or "the city of America" on the "healthy hills that intersect the Isthmus or near Panama and where a canal may be made from sea to sea, by locks." His "Political Economy: Founded in Justice and Humanity. In a Letter to a Friend" had Mr. Madison as the friend. It advocated the abolition of slavery.

Dr. Thornton was a poet. His poetry might not have gained him celebrity, nevertheless, the brilliant John Randolph of Roanoke matched with the Doctor's rhymes, two pages of his prose.

"Received this 17<sup>th</sup> day of January, 1820, of Dr. William Thornton, two M. S. pages of current Rhyme for which I bind myself to make payment in good & lawful prose at a rate of exchange to be settled (in case of disagreement between the parties) by referees to be by them chosen.

His

Johns X Randolph of Roanoke.

Mark

Witness

C. F. Mercer

To Mayor Brent, the Doctor sent his man. His man had the message in measure:



April 12, 1811

TO THE GOOD PEOPLE.

Pray let the Bearer, Peter, pass,  
He rides a Horse, & leads an ass—  
This is the *Vicar* fam'd of *Bray*  
He goes, at M<sup>r</sup> Brent's to stay  
Peter returns, without delay

TO PETER

If any one you chance to meet  
Stay not to talk, but pass & greet,  
And neither give nor take a treat

Dr. Thornton was a magistrate. In the reign of terror in France, in jail was General Louis Marie Turreau de Garambouville. On the door of his cell was the chalk which marked him for the morrow's exercises. The daughter of the jailor compassionately removed the chalk and the General remained, remained to be the French Minister to the United States and to marry the jailor's daughter and take her with him. It was an act of gratitude which proved an act of ingratitude. Said Mrs. Madison: "I have heard said dreadful things of Turreau—that he whips his wife, and abuses her dreadfully; I pity her sincerely; she is an amiable and sensible woman." (June 4, 1805). The General had as attaché the talented Count de Carbre. The Count with the flute could translate the passions. With the flute he tried to drown Mme. Turreau's outcries of pain. A year and a half after Mrs. Madison's letter came the Turreau climax.

Declared the General in writing:

October 29, 1806.

"I declare positively that after many refusals of Madame Turreau to pass into France, according to my order as her

Husband as well as Minister Plenipotentiary of his Imperial and royal majesty, my Intention was to employ force to oblige her to go thither; that consequently after preparing for her passing in a vessel (at Annapolis). I gave her repeated orders to depart, when her Cries, in spite of my endeavours to pacify her, drew a Crowd of (American) Citizens round my House; and notwithstanding my public character as Minister to France & the Privileges derived from it, I went to the Door of my House, and then a magistrate who was among them told me that the People had assembled in consequence of hearing a noise in my House; on which I requested him to walk into my House and see the interior, in order to satisfy his Fellow Citizens."

The written declaration of the magistrate, in part, is:

"In consequence of the above Invitation given to the before mentioned magistrate (W. T.) and also to W<sup>m</sup> P Gardner last night ab<sup>t</sup> ten o'clock—we went into the House of the French Minister, and were shewn into an upper Room where we found his Lady with three French Seamen or Soldiers who were prepared to carry her off by force. She declared in Tears, that she claimed the protection of the United States against such violence. The General turned to the seamen and said *mark that, fellow citizens*; she claims the protection of the United States and thus gives up mine.—She said the French Government would not now protect her but she would claim the protection of France after. We interfered in a friendly manner, and begged to know if it would not accord more with the Title of an Officer of the Legion of honor to permit his wife to depart in peace, rather than subject her to the brutal Insults of common sailors, who were ordered to take her by force? It was also mentioned to him by W. T. that the People were waiting in peace to know if an attempt would be made to force her away; for if it should be attempted they said they were determined to liberate her. He said

his men were armed. It was observed the People could not be intimidated, were she guarded by the whole legion of honor, and if a shot were fired it was probable not one of his men would escape alive.—He said the Laws of Nation's would be invaded, and he would call the protection of Government. It was answered the Laws of God & humanity were paramount to the Laws of Nation's; and our Citizens would not put them in competition. \* \* \*

The harrowing detail of separation is omitted, save to say, on bended knees she besought a parting sight of her children and to his peremptory refusal, he only relented, and that at the entreaties of her foreign friends in her arms "to take the sucking child." She departed from the house, the corner of the Seven Buildings (Pennsylvania avenue and 19th street) with the magistrate and his associate.

The outcome of Latrobe's appointment as architect of the Capitol was a controversy. To controvert a communication to the Committee of Congress (H. R.) by Latrobe, Thornton issued a pamphlet. It is in a bound volume owned and indexed by Jefferson. Latrobe's animosity towards Thornton was inherited by his son, John H. B. Latrobe; the inheritance is exhibited in the published address before the American Institute of Architects (1881). In the Library of Congress is an envelope marked:

November 5, 1907:

"*Private* Papers of Dr. Wm. Thornton relating to the controversy with Benj. H. Latrobe—with regard to Mr. Latrobe's proposed alteration of the Doctor's plans in building the Capitol, said papers given to the Library of Congress, with others of Dr. Thornton's by J Henley Smith with the condition that these particular papers as contained in this package shall not be opened until the year 1925—"

Latrobe, in a lawsuit, alleged damages at \$10,000, they were assessed at one cent.<sup>12</sup>

The Doctor was also the defendant in a suit for the recovery of \$3,000 he received for his celebrated racer, Rattler. It was in this connection he was the butt of the couplet:

“With his horses unfed, he loses his races,  
With his lawyers unfeed, he loses his cases.”

Dr. Thornton had a love for horses. Their names made a catalogue. With the wife he took, he took her mother. It is whispered the Doctor stood in awe both of his wife and his mother-in-law—allies in taking the domestic reins in their hands. On the same authority, the petticoat alliance opposed the Doctor's passion to take chances on the turf. The latter assertion, at least, is subject to doubt for Mrs. Thornton kept at all times a roster of the Doctor's thoroughbreds and never failed of a chance to write in her diary—“Went to the races.” The triangle of harmony between the mother, the mother's daughter, and the daughter's husband, made envy for the envious. Of the stable, Eclipse Herod, was the Doctor's pride. Eclipse sickened, Dr. Thornton was no horse doctor and the horse died. He was buried like a human, with solemnity and sadness.

Dr. Thornton established the race course. It was on Columbia road just west of 14th street. Everybody went to the races. Said a Congressman, Dr. Mitchell:

<sup>12</sup> \* \* \* “When Latrobe was in the city on the business of the proposed naval dry docks, Dr. Thornton stated Latrobe ‘often complimented me on the plan of the capitol’ \* \* \* In an addenda to his pamphlet, Latrobe declares that this remark to Thornton ‘was only one of my polite ambiguities and I only said so to flatter him into a friendly wish to see me appointed (surveyor of public buildings) for it never was my opinion.’”—A History of the National Capital, W. B. Bryan.

"So keen was the relish for the sport that there was a serious wish of a number of the members to adjourn Congress for a few days. \* \* \* The Senate actually did adjourn for three days, not on account of the races, you will observe, but merely to admit a mason to plaster the ceiling of their chamber which had fallen down a few days before. \* \* \* The sport being over, the great men and the pretty women and the sporting jockeys and the reverend sirs and many of the little folks quitted the field."

Dr. Thornton was a soldier. He was of the militia. He was a cavalry officer, first a lieutenant (1807). He cut such a gallant figure on a spirited steed he was made a captain (1811). Way in front he rode on inaugural days. For the day of parade came the day of protection. The Doctor was English and of the Society of Friends, but his Lancashire lineage did not lessen ardor for his adopted country or give excuse for cowardice and in the clash between it and Great Britain he promptly put on his sword and mounted his charger. Everybody after the affair at Bladensburg, if not too faint, ran away—the President, his cabinet, his officers. Dr. Thornton remained. The British were on the point of firing the Patent Office, Dr. Thornton plead "that it was the museum of the arts & that it wou'd be loss to all the world." The Patent Office was exempted by the vandals. Dr. Thornton to the President and his council, unadvisedly, recommended no further defense. He was rebuffed. He put on again his sword, called together the defenders. The enemy gone; courage came. And there was the spirit of patriotism:

"Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!"

And a spirit of heroism:

Strike—for your altars and your fires!  
Strike—for the green graves of your sires!  
God, and your native land!"

And there was a battle royal. The first blow then the fire of ink. Every one fought for himself and the ink-scarred were Dr. Thornton, James H. Blake, the Mayor, Commissioner Tingey, Dr. James Ewell, Commissioner Rodgers, Gen. Winder, Mr. Monroe, the President. So relentless was the unsanguinary strife that Dr. Blake claimed Dr. Thornton was no poet; and Dr. Thornton charged Dr. Blake with cowardice because it happened he had affairs out of the city when the British visited.

In the recess of hostilities were some affiliations between the visiting and the residing British and Dr. Thornton exchanged civilities with Gen. William Thornton.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Thornton had recourse to the public prints to defend himself against misrepresentations. Even Mrs. Madison gave credit to falsehoods. Mrs. Thornton had called on Mrs. Madison. Mrs. Thornton's journal has that moderation that the scriptural sentiment can be reverently repeated, "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again."

The kindness of the French Minister's wife is disclosed in her reply to Mrs. Thornton:

"Mrs. Serurier had the honour to receive Mrs. Thornton's note. She has given orders to admit in the house Mrs. Barlow's furniture. In case Mrs. Thornton had any thing belonging to herself that she would wish to place in asylum (although she is in hopes that it will be no occasion for it) Mrs. Serurier would be very happy to seize any opportunity she would offer her to be some of service to her."

"Kalorama, August 20<sup>th</sup>. 1814."

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<sup>13</sup>He went to see a namesake, who was wounded and lay ill at Bladensburg and who when he recovered returned his call—these were the only communications he had with the English—Mrs. Thornton, May, 1853.

The scheme of a steamboat which eventuated in success was the thought of John Fitch. His devises and efforts to procure the means of exploitation were partially successful. He began in 1785. Dr. Thornton a couple years later enthusiastically and effectively co-operated with him in experimenting and financing.

Writes Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville:

"Monday, Sept. 1st, 1788.

\* \* \* I went to see an experiment which was being tried near the Delaware, on board of a boat, the object of which was to ascend rivers against the stream. The inventor was Mr. Fitch. He had formed a company to carry out his enterprise. One of the stockholders and his most zealous advocate, was Dr. Thornton, \* \* \* who I saw was assailed with jokes on account of this steam-boat.

He was annoyed by these pleasantries which appeared to me to be very much out of place. The obstacles which genius is everywhere obliged to surmount, are so considerable, the incentives are so slight, and the necessity in America of supplying demonstration, that I could not without indignation, see the Americans retarding by their sarcasms the generous efforts of one of their fellow citizens." A Recent Journey in the United States of North America.

Thomas P. Cope, in 7th volume of Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania has given his recollections:

"Whilst Robert Fulton was thus engaged in London, John Fitch, clock maker, was contriving schemes in Philadelphia for the propulsion of his boats by steam. He conducted his mysterious operations at a projection on the shores of the Delaware, at Kensington, which among the wise and prudent of the neighborhood, the scorers of magicians and their dark works, soon acquired the ominous and fearful title of *Conjurer's Point*. I often witnessed the performances of the boat in 1788 '89 and '90."

Dr. Thornton in a short account of the origin of steamboats, written in 1810, has this account of a trial trip in Front or Water street, Philadelphia:

“A mile was measured. Every precaution was taken, before witnesses, the time shown to all; the experiment declared to be fairly made, and the boat was found to go at the rate of eight miles an hour, or one mile within the eighth of an hour; on which the shares were signed over, with great satisfaction, by the rest of the company. \* \* \* The Governor and Council of Pennsylvania were so highly gratified with our labours, that without their intentions being previously known to us, Governor Mifflin, attended by the council in procession, presented to the company, and placed in the boat, a superb silk flag, prepared expressly and containing the arms of Pennsylvania.”

Mr. Fitch, in England, deposited the flag with Rufus King who brought it to New York and offered to deliver it to Dr. Thornton.

It appears in Mrs. Brodeau's letter that consequent to Dr. Thornton's marriage and his continuance in Tortola that progress in the promotion of the steamboat flagged.

Mr. Fitch, in France, endeavored to enlist encouragement. And of what there in connection happened is:

Nathaniel Cutting, in a letter to Fernando Fairfax, gives the substance of a conversation with Mr. Vail on the subject:

“Mr. Vail further remarked that he himself was not sufficiently acquainted with mechanics to know whether or not the mechanism now intended to be used by Mr. Fulton was the same in principle with that formerly invented and used by Mr. Fitch; but it might be the same, for aught he knew, for he had lent to Mr. Fulton, at Paris, all the specifications and drawings of Mr. Fitch, and they remained in his possession several months; and doubtless a man of Mr. Fulton's ingenuity would not fail to profit by any new and



useful combination of the mechanical power that he might discover, especially as he supposed no one living would convict him of the plagiarism."

Fitch, broken in spirit and in health, had returned to Bardstown, Kentucky. In (July 2) 1798, for an ailment, a physician prescribed opium at certain hours. The patient correctly reasoned that if he took all at once it would end the ailment. In his will he gave to a "trusty friend" the articles that added to attractiveness of person, to wit: his "Beaver Hat, shoe, knee and stock buckles, walking stick and spectacles;" and the rest and residue of his estate, which was nothing, he gave to Dr. Thornton and three other friends.

Dr. Thornton to Mr. Fulton, December 16, 1807, writes:

"I was engaged in a Steam Boat several years ago projected by the late John Fitch who only conceived the Idea of applying Steam to the propelling of Boats, but had never seen a Steam Engine."

Dr. Thornton's short account of the origin of steam-boats begins:

"Finding that Robert Fulton, whose genius and talents I highly respect, has been by some considered as the inventor of the steam boat, I think it a duty to the memory of the late John Fitch, to set forth with as much brevity as possible, the fallacy of this opinion; and to show, moreover, that if Mr. Fulton has any claim whatever to originality, in his steam boat, it must be exceedingly limited."<sup>14</sup>

KALORAMA, January 9, 1811.

*To Dr. Thornton:*

*Dear Sir:* Having an unfortunate bile, and being altogether so unwell that I shall probably not be able to go out

<sup>14</sup>"Two of Fitch's company and I appeared without counsel, and pleaded our own cause in the assembly of Pennsylvania and after a week's patient hearing against the most learned counsel of Pennsylvania, we obtained a decision in our favour, and afterwards also in Delaware"—In re-Rumsey claim.

of the house in a fortnight, I shall be happy to have some conversation with you on your steamboat inventions and experience. Although I do not see by what means a boat containing one hundred tons of merchandise can be driven six miles an hour in still water, yet when you assert your perfect confidence in such success, there may be something more in your combinations than I am aware of. As such success would be of infinite national importance, I should feel disposed on the principles of patriotism, to give the essay every aid, at the same time to make such an arrangement as would secure you an ample fortune. To prove your principles by practice, it has occurred to me that one of two things may be done: either that you find some one to join you, with funds, to build the boat, and if you succeed to run six miles an hour in still water, with one hundred tons of merchandise, I will contract to reimburse the cost of the boat, and to give you one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for your patent; or, if you can convince me of your success by drawings or demonstrations, I will join you in the expenses and profits. Please to think of this, and have the goodness to let me see or hear from you as soon as possible.

I am, sir, your most obedient,

ROBERT FULTON

To this proposal, Dr. Thornton says that he agreed at once, but Mr. Fulton declined to write the terms. U. S. Patent Office Report, Part 1, p. 370.

Dr. Thornton gives a succinct review:

CITY OF WASH. 20th April 1819  
1820.

*Sir*

My worthy & highly esteemed Friend, the Hon. W<sup>m</sup>. Graham is setting out in a few days as Minister, for Rio Janeiro—Thirty years ago I engaged with Mr. John Fitch the original Inventor of Steam Boats, a poor ignorant & illiterate man. We worked for about a year & half, & the Boat did not exceed two or three miles an hour through dead water. I then engaged to make it go at the rate of

eight miles an hour within 18 months or forfeit all my expenditures, provided I might be invested with one quarter if I succeeded. The agreement was made, & in one year I succeeded & obtained a quarter of the whole concern— The first boat was 60 feet long but narrow. A boat was then built rigged schooner fashion to go to New Orleans from Phil<sup>a</sup> of 25 Tons burthen, and calculated to ascend the Mississippi at the rate of 6 miles an hour or to go ten miles in dead water. I went to visit my Mother in the West Indies where I was born, and staid away two years; but on my return I found they had never been able to make her move, & to pay the Debts incurred by this want of success they had sold both the Boats, & the whole apparatus.

I was then obliged to wait till the Patent had expired & take out a patent for my own Invention and Improvements. Ab<sup>t</sup> the time the Patent expired Mr. Fulton came to America from Europe, & began a steam boat in conjunction with the late Chancellor Livingston—But Mr. Fulton had seen my papers describing the steam Boat in the hands of one of Fitch's Partners in France, to whom I had sent them, to take out a patent there. Mr. Fulton had a compleat steam engine made in England, which he brought to this country: he brought also a compleat engineer, & had nothing to do but put the works on board to ensure success.

He of course succeeded, but without having invented a single improvement. Success however give him not only all the profits but the eclat of the Invention, with those who were not acquainted with the circumstances.

To Henry Hill     }  
 Consul,                }  
 St. Salvador."       }

W. T.

John Quincy Adams says, April 26, 1819, that he called at the Patent Office and found there Dr. Thornton; that he called on the business of a constituent interested in steam appliance. He continues:

"Fulton's steamboats have turned all the projecting heads in that direction. Fulton himself invented little or nothing, but by the aid of Chancellor Livingston's fortune he made the invention of others practically useful. Fulton's patent privilege from nature was enterprise and perseverance. He was doubtless ingenious too, but, I believe, not more so than many ordinary mechanics. \* \* \* He (Dr. Thornton) also told me the whole story of his own steamboat, which actually ran upon the Schuylkill several years before Fulton's but which failed of ultimate success merely by his want of perseverance and pecuniary means."

John F. Watson was the annalist of Philadelphia. He set off his annals in separate subjects. His historical spread he like unto an epicure who his fish garnishes with a sprig of parsley, he did with a bit of poetry. And of the steamboat time, 1830, thus:

"Of each wonderful plan  
E'er invented by man,  
This nearest perfection approaches—  
No longer gee-up and gee-ho,  
But fiz—fiz! off we go,  
Nine miles to the hour,  
With fifty horse-power,  
By day time and night time  
Arrive at the right time,  
Without rumble or jumble  
Or chance of a tumble,  
As in chaise, gig, or whiskey,  
When horses are frisky."

In the credit for the invention, it may be detected that the Doctor at first said *he*; further on, *we*; finally *I*. Exactly what his contribution was, at this distance of time, is not to be determined; likely it was a major part. Fitch conceived, Thornton contributed, Fulton completed. A crown of fame of like lustre let us give to each.

Dr. Thornton was an inventor. His patents are many and principally are in application of steam.\* Fernando Fairfax engaged to pay him £2,000 for a quarter interest in his patents.

Dr. Thornton had charge of the patents for the Government from his retirement as commissioner, May, 1802, until his death. He was the first Patent Commissioner. Glenn Brown gives Mr. Campbell's statement "During many years of his superintendency, he freely exercised his discretion in issuing patents. In a communication to the Secretary of State, January 16, 1818, Thornton defined equities and limitations of a reissue as concisely and luminously as ever has been done by any court or text writer." At the present date an opinion of the Commissioner of Patents in his own hand would surprise.

Dept. of State  
Patent Office, 8<sup>th</sup>, April 1809.

*Sir,*

I have examined your Papers—they are nearly in order for a Patent, except that the Drawing is very bad, \* \* \* be so good as to send it more legible.—Be so good also as to state whether you are a citizen of the U. States, or only a resident for two years, as your citizenship is not mentioned.—I do not think the Invention new, though it varies in some degree from others & may therefore be thought by you an Improvement &, as such, patentable.—

I am,

Sir

very respectfully y<sup>r</sup>. &c.

Amos Easton, Esq<sup>re</sup>.

WILLIAM THORNTON.

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\*List of Dr. Thornton's patented inventions: Improvement in boilers and working stills, October 28, 1802. An improved still, December 13, 1807. Improvement in steamboats and boilers, January 16, 1809. Improvement in ameliorating spirits and mines, etc., September 7, 1809. Improvement in fire-arms, loading at the breech, patented by Dr. Thornton and John S. Hall, of Harpers Ferry, May 21, 1811. Application of steam to flutters and paddles to boats, &c., December 23, 1814. Improvement in cooling water and other liquids, July 31, 1827. Caveat. Casting glasses for telescope, &c., November 4, 1826.

Christian Hines in *Early Recollections of Washington City*, has:

"The flat, or bar, on the south side of the Tiber, and from the Washington Monument, in a westerly direction to near the Potomac channel, and thence in a southerly direction to near the Long Bridge, including within its limits perhaps sixteen or eighteen acres, was, in the early age of the city, taken up and claimed, so it was said, by the late Dr. William Thornton, he having, he thought, the best title thereto, by right of discovery. He calculated that, in a short time, it would be filled up by deposits from the Potomac. To cause it to fill up more speedily than it naturally would, he planted a number of little saplings and bushes along and near the channel, and in various parts of the flat, so as to define the bounds of his domain. These saplings and bushes remained there for a number of years, and some of them until the years 1813 and 1814, when we were encamped on Observatory Hill, for I remember that we used to select the largest of them as targets to fire at when the guard were discharged each morning; but I suppose there is not a sign of them now.

"I was always of the opinion that this flat was either the property of the Corporation of Washington or of the United States,—more probably that of the latter."

The idea of Dr. Thornton took a more concrete form with Dr. John L. Kidwell. He secured a government patent for the Kidwell flats. In a comprehensive litigation, a cause celebre, the United States won under the legal leading of Hugh T. Taggart, Esq. The opinion was by the learned Justice Hagner, announcing the decision of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia; the decision was affirmed by the Supreme Court of the United States. Thornton's discovery or Kidwell's flats is a major part of the Potomac Park where is the Lincoln Memorial.

From General Winfield Scott, January, 1817:

*Dear Sir,*

Permit me to introduce to your acquaintance the distinguished patriot Gen. Mina of old Spain, with whose history you are already well acquainted.

I am respectfully  
my dear Sir  
Yr most ob.

W. SCOTT.

D<sup>r</sup> Thornton, Washington

Francisco Javier Mina in Spain to repel the invasion of the French, took off the sombre robes of the priesthood and put on the brilliant regalia of the military.

"W. Thornton's most respectful Compliments to General Mina, and acknowledges with great pleasure, General Scott's politeness & kindness in furnishing W. T. with an opportunity of expressing with what sincerity he shall hail General Mina on his arrival here.—He rejoices that so distinguished a Patriot has been led by Providence to a Country where the voice of welcome will rapturously greet so noble and worthy a patriot;—and where the sacred cause of universal freedom and happiness will call for the exertions & talents of the generous the brave and virtuous."

Mina was on the way to give the Mexican patriots independence. He ventured too far over the border and fell into the mercies of those Mexicans who were not patriots with the usual Mexican finish.<sup>15</sup>

City of Wash<sup>n</sup>., 18<sup>th</sup>: Nov: 1818.

*Dear Sir*

I am well aware of the impropriety of troubling you at this time with any affairs which could be postponed, for I truly sympathize in your late loss, and am the more sensible of it in having myself sustained a similar one in the loss of my Mother, my only parent, my Father having died

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<sup>15</sup>Surprised at night at the rancho of Venadito, near Irapuato, Guanajuato. Was executed November 11, 1817.

when I was but two years old.—In such an affliction there is but one consolation; that the virtuous are received in the mansions of eternal felicity. This consolation you enjoy & it is a legacy without price.—

I would have waited upon you personally but from an unwillingness to intrude.—

Accept my most respectful consideration

W. T.

Hon. J. Q. Adams.

Washington 23, November 1818.

Doctor W Thornton

*Dear Sir*

“Please to accept my warm acknowledgments for your very kind Letter of condolence upon the misfortune which has befallen me, by the decease of my Mother, and the assurance of the cordial sympathy with which I reciprocate your sentiments, on the bereavement of the same dearest of relatives, with which you have been recently afflicted. If there is one cord of human affection mingled with gratitude stronger than all others it is that between the Mother and her child; and when, as in your case, the Mother, was from the earliest dawn of memory the only surviving Parent, it must be doubly strong and affecting. May you on this distressing event enjoy the consolation, which as you justly observe is above all price.

Your other Letter with its enclosure has also been received and it will afford me great satisfaction, if I can be of any service to you in obtaining from Congress a compensation more adequate to the important and arduous duties of your Office, than that which has hitherto been allowed.

I am, Dear Sir, with great regard and esteem, your obed serv<sup>t</sup>.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Dr. Thornton rushed where angels might hesitate and the high in state station received his unasked assistance in diplomatic disputes as the acts of a busy-



body. The Doctor having heard that the President was offended, through Mr. Adams asked an interview be granted him. Mr. Adams did not report literally, "The President said that he would not see him, nor have any conversation with him upon anything, unless it were patents, and very little upon them." (February 14, 1818. )

Dr. Thornton, as he gained in years, lost in optimism. Oppressive conditions repressed. And he wrote to the Secretary of State, Mr. Adams, March 22, 1819, (he had previously written to the President, Mr. Monroe, to the same effect) that the Commissionership of Patents was more than a clerkship and should have a financial distinction. He reminded that "I have refused from my devoted attachment to this government, every offer of honor & profit to which the South Americans have repeatedly pressed my acceptance." It is in this letter or the other, he coined that common phrase "the high cost of living."

Dr. Thornton was a continuous candidate for a mission to Central America, South America, or Greece or anywheres. The long autographic letters of the President, Mr. Monroe, and of the Secretary of State, Mr. Adams, explaining why not and assuring the Doctor they loved him just the same were to him chaff and unsatisfying and he continued a candidate.

To John Adams, (the elder) :

August 3, 1822.

\* \* \* I was represented as identified with the South Americans & as having been deeply engaged in the Revolution. So that the very reason which rendered me the most proper representative of the North Americans, & would have induced the South Americans to receive me with the most cordial amity, was the cause of my rejection."

John Quincy Adams had distinct views and decided expression. He was a Unitarian; and a criticism by him of another form of worship is, of course, only his:

Washington, March 25<sup>th</sup> 1821. I went with Dr. Thornton this morning to the Quaker meeting. There were from forty to fifty men present, and about as many females. We sat nearly two hours in perfect silence—no moving of the spirit; and I seldom, in the course of my life, passed two hours more wearily. Perhaps from not having been inured to this form of public worship, I found myself quite unable to reduce my mind to that musing meditation which makes the essence of this form of devotion. It was rambling from this world to the next, and from the next back to this, chance-directed; and, curious to know what was really passing in the minds of those around me, I asked Dr. Thornton, after we came out, what he had been thinking of while we had been there. He said he did not know; he had been much inclined to sleep. Solitude and silence are natural allies, and social silence may be properly allied with social labor. But social meditation is an incongruity. I felt, on my coming from this meeting, as if I had wasted precious time."

City of Washington, 6<sup>th</sup>, Sept. 1825.

*My dear Sir*

\* \* \* This is your Birth-day! May the Almighty permit many returns thereof, & may you enjoy in this world all the felicities that the Eternal Spirit accords to mortals, & receive those unspeakable rewards in the world to come which are prepared for all the just & good!

Accept for yourself, your excellent Son & Friend,  
my most affectionate farewell.—

W: T:—

General LaFayette

Dr. Thornton was elected an Honorary Member of the Maryland Institute for the Promotion of the Mechanic Arts. The notification is dated Baltimore, November 4, 1826 and signed John H. B. Latrobe.

Of the preserved letters of Dr. Thornton, those of Mr. Jefferson will make a fair-sized volume. Numerous are the other letters to him and from celebrities whose celebrity in many cases was won by usefulness other than by statecraft. Dr. Thornton was a factor in the government because of his acquaintance with the strong at home and his accord with the ministers from abroad. His correspondence was with the scientific, the world over. He was in touch with the South American and West Indian governments and his proffered advice may have had some availment. Among his correspondents were John Trumbull, John McLean, Rufus King, H. St. George Tucker, William Wirt, Basil Hall, Stratford Canning, Jacques Pierre Brissot, J. Correa de Serra, of Brazil; Señor Don Manuel de Saratea, Supreme Director of the Republic of Buenos Ayres, and Dr Pedro Gual, LL. D., Secretary of State and of Foreign Relations of the Republic of Colombia.

Captain Basil Hall in travels in North America (1827-'28) saw us unpleasantly with the usual English vision. Of the city of Washington, he said, it "looks as if some giant had scattered a box of child's toys at random on the ground." I cannot refrain from giving in full a letter of Dr. Thornton's, written within a few months of his death, as it is so reflective of his character.

"W. Thornton's respectful compliments to Captain Basil Hall & would immediately have waited on him to pay his respects to wish him the comp<sup>ts</sup> of the season & to congratulate him on his safe arrival at the metropolis of the U States where he will meet with most cordial & universal welcome but W. T. is at present confined by sickness.—He writs Capt. Hall to hear the Oration this day at two o'clock at the Capitol by Mr. Southard Secy of the Navy Dep<sup>t</sup>. a Member of the Columbian Institute; and he also requests the honor of

the company of Captain Hall to dine with the Institute this Day at half past 4 o'clock at Gadsby's Hotel.—W. Thornton had the honor of being acquainted with the late Lord Selkirk, & Mr. Halket.—He was also a student in the same class with Sir James Hall when at Edinburgh.

“City of Wash<sup>n</sup>: 31<sup>st</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup>. 1827—

Dr. Thornton died Friday, March 28, 1828 “after a tedious confinement, by malady, which he bore with unruffled resignation.” The interment was on Sunday and to it went the President and the prominent. No higher honor possible in the city than the recognition by the association of the cultured.

Columbian Institute,

April 1, 1828

At a special meeting held this day, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

Resolved, That a discourse be delivered before the Institute, on the character of the late Doctor Thornton, one of the founders of the Society, and that the members wear crape one month, as a mark of respect for his memory.

A. DICKENS.

Secretary.

In the Memorial is this tribute:

“Dr. Thornton was distinguished by a clear understanding, a tenacious memory, and exuberant imagination. Highly gifted by nature, those gifts were exalted by an excellent education. His benevolence expanded into philanthropy, was active and boundless.”

William Dunlap in the History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design:

“He was a scholar and a gentleman—full of talent and eccentricity—a quaker by profession, a painter, a poet, and a horse-racer—well acquainted with the mechanic arts—He was ‘a man of infinite humour’—humane and generous,

yet fond of field sports—his company was a complete antidote to dullness.”

Letter of Mrs. Thornton to Robert Mills, the architect:

Sir—I wish you to prepare a Bracket or niche to receive the Bust of the late D W. T—whom I consider as the *regenerator* of the patent office—it is owing almost entirely to his constant & unremitted assiduity & attention that so much encouragement was given to foster the genius & invention of the Citizens of the U. S.—& tho’ his cotemporaries have not awarded him the honor due to him, in that & various other ways, I trust that posterity will do him justice.—

I am Sr  
respectfully yrs &c.

A M T—

Mrs. Thornton to Dr. Thornton was partial in effect and impartial in her criticisms. Of what, she writes of him, in part is:

“He was a sincere friend, & as far as his means wou’d allow a patron to all artists, & cou’d he have gratified his wishes, wou’d always have had one or more under his roof; several have at different times made his home their home for weeks & months together. He had a great taste for painting as the beautiful specimens of drawings & paintings he has left will testify.

The reverence for the works of the Deity was unbounded, & his love of knowledge so great, that his expansive mind sought it in the Bowels of the Earth & the Heavens above—as may be seen in many essays left behind him; the smallest Insect, & the noblest animals were the objects of his research; & his philanthropy led him to try to enlighten mankind, & benefit them by his study & observation & if he cou’d not accomplish all his ardent & benevolent mind sought to attain, he will have credit, with mankind for his zeal in the Cause of learning & Science & Virtue.—

He was told by a Member of Congress "that he had lived a hundred years too soon!"—his Views being too extended, his plans too vast to be embraced by men generally—a *few very few*, meeting & estimating his liberal Ideas, & noble plans.—

His search after knowledge was perhaps too general, as it embraced almost every subject; had his genius been confined to fewer subjects, had he concentrated his study to some particular science, he wou'd have attained Celebrity, by becoming more deeply learned in some particular branch for he cou'd have attained perfection in any art or science had he given up his mind solely to one pursuit—philosophy, politics, Finance, astronomy, medicine, Botany, Poetry, painting, religion, agriculture, in short all subjects by turns occupied his active & indefatigable mind.—But who can curb an excursive mind led by Curiosity into all the labyrinths of knowledge, & searching eagerly after new lights; such a mind must sometimes be led away by the meteors of Genius, to a versatility of pursuits & cannot be bounded, like the plodding, every day beings, who form the greatest portion of this terrestrial Globe."

Mrs. Thornton preserved the numerous papers for a biography. Besides of the Doctor much there is in libraries, societies and collections. And a most remarkable fact it is, that other than as a physician, there is no mention of any preparation or instruction by which he came to his varied acquirements and attainments.

Mme. Alice Geubel de la Ruelle of Paris, a few days since, of the wife of our Executive said: "Mrs. Wilson is what we would call a wife-partner of her husband, supplementing his official activities." It applies to Mrs. Thornton. She was a helpmeet. She was an understudy. In what he perfected himself, so did she. So when he made the rough creative sketch, she could

draw the careful lines and circles. That his burdens might be less, she did the drudgery of account-keeping.

I understand from the entries in Mrs. Thornton's diary that she studied art under Gilbert Stuart. Painted by her in water colors are the estates of Monticello and Montpelier and other examples of her art are extant.

From the diary of Mrs. Thornton:

1800, September Tuesday 16 After dinner we went to the Executive Office to look at a picture of Gen<sup>l</sup> Washington painted by Stewart and to be put in the Presidents' House—do not think it a good likeness.

From *The Washington Times*, August 24, 1914:

"Washington never deserved to have the Gilbert Stuart portrait taken seriously. It was not taken seriously by the man who made it or by any of his contemporaries. It made no pretense of being a likeness. Even now, it ought to be banished and some of the authentic likenesses of Washington taken up as the basis of popular portraiture."

Mrs. Thornton's diary begins with September 30, 1798, and ends August, 1865. Some parts are missing. The facts were entered on the day. They are indubitable. Rarely are they with comment. First is stated the day of the month, the day of the week, and the weather condition. Many oversights in newspaper and other accounts are supplied; and what is supplied is important in completing a narrative. The diary is of valuable historic worth notwithstanding her deprecation, December 31, 1829:

"Our lives pass on, one day so much like another that there is little use in recording its daily events—to myself it is sometimes gratifying to refer to days past—but to others useless—I have for many years kept these memo-

randums & it has become a habit that I can hardly resign—but why do what will not gratify or serve anyone?—notwithstanding I go on!”

On Independence Day, the host’s courtesy to the crowd was such that Mrs. Thornton unobserved could slip into the conservatory at the President’s House and make the theft. And today there is a mite of an envelope with this endorsement by Mrs. Thornton:

“A geranium leaf stolen from Mr. Jeffersons cabinet on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1804”

I peered into the envelope, the faded leaf is in it.

Fair exchange is no robbery; yet, Mrs. Thornton paid a conscience contribution by a strong specimen of the flower of the Celestial Empire, here, then a rarity—principal and usury for an insignificant leaf.

“Th: Jefferson presents his respectful compliments to Mrs. Thornton and is able now to restore to her the plant of chrysanthemum she was so kind as to send him the last summer, having taken from it this spring a luxuriant shoot and set it in a box, in which it is growing well, he return(s) her his thanks for the same.”

The letters Mrs. Thornton had from the brilliant were their estimation of her worth. I pass over the letters from Mrs. Madison, Lady (Mary C.) Bagot, wife of the British Minister; John Howard Payne and Henry Clay.

To M<sup>rs</sup> Thornton

“Our sex Dear Madam for a while  
May bear with some *Expostulation*  
But after all will only smile  
And cease to think of reformation—  
Of empty heads we all may write



But how to fill them few can tell,  
*Cutting* severity's far to trite  
To cure or mend a grown up belle.  
Your Fable with delight I read  
Its moral merits, strike and please us,  
While Popish puns together bred  
Real sensations sadly grievous—  
La Mancha's Knight these close pursues  
To chase away sad Retrospection,  
Blythe Wit with humour decks his Muse  
Exciting mirth and admiration—  
For compliments my brain I rack  
'Tis all in vain, I ne'er knew how,  
So follow through the beaten track  
Of learning how to cringe and bow—  
Affection's thanks alone I offer  
Madam accept the kindly proffer.

LOUISA.

(Mrs. Adams, April 1, 1821.)

*Dr Sir*

I beg you will read the enclosed & return them to me—  
It affects me deeply to see these proofs of his good feelings  
& to think that tho' I lived with him so many years that I  
did not know him as well as I do now—& that I *might per-*  
*haps* have saved him from being led into the labyrinth of  
debts and difficulties to which I fear he fell a victim—  
You will understand my feelings I am sure—

Yrs most respectfully

A M T

Col<sup>d</sup> Bomford

Dr. Thornton was embarrassed; however, his prop-  
erty exceeded his indebtedness by a substantial mar-  
gin. The property he purchased, almost all, he could

never sell. For value at this date he could hardly have made better purchases. His entire estate he left to Mrs. Thornton and Mrs. Brodeau; the part by them unconverted to be for the emancipation and education of the negro.

Thomas Law's poem had this accompanying note:

*Dear Madam—*

“Accept the lines you wish'd to view  
Amounting just to fifty-two—  
The theme I fancy is quite new  
And if a little credits due  
'Tis that I have preserv'd the clue  
Rhyming alternately all through—  
To term most awkward Barbacue  
In prose the language of truth

I remain  
With sincere esteem  
Yrs mt sy

T LAW

In August, 1835, a slave of Mrs. Thornton made an attempt to murder her and Mrs. Brodeau, at night, with an axe. He was prevented by his own mother. The indignation was to the pitch, that, in revenge, mobs of white people destroyed negro dwellings, school houses and a church.

Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith was the authoress of the city's early days. In the latter days, her letters have been compiled with the title *Forty Years of Washington Society*. The letter to Mrs. Thornton, as any of them, is as delightful to peruse and as defiant to punctuation.

Christmas day 1835

Were your circumstances even happier than they at present are, I would not my Dear friend wish you a *Merry Christmas*, as from my own feelings I do not consider merri-ment & happiness as synonomous—But with my whole heart I wish you a quiet, comfortable day & hope that we together may enjoy a social, pleasant evening.

Say, my dear friend, cannot you all come around this evening—Indeed it will be *better* for you than staying at home & indulging in a worse than useless—in a *hurtful* melancholy. It does no one good, & does you much harm, & it is your positive duty to take care of your *own* health on which so entirely depends your ability to support the declining days of your mother. So do this, you must by going out & taking more exercise, try to direct your thoughts from the painful object on which they are continually fixed. You will say, it is easy for those who do not suffer to give advice, but indeed my friend I only advise what I myself practice, for whenever my heart is heavy or my spirits depressed I use every means to throw off my burthen & have ever found air, exercise & the company of friends the best means of so doing—I repeat, do not *think* so much of one subject—

How is your dear mother this morning, I hope she will be able to drink a little of Bayard's egg nog. *Let me know if she* will be able to come out this evening—If she cannot, I shall try to come round to say how de ye do to her—I wish Mrs Miller would come. the Dr. I shall certainly expect, as he promised to take a glass of egg nog & a hand at cards with us—

Thirty-five christmas days have passed in Washington—and though many, many dear & valued friends who successively enjoyed with us this holiday, are departed to another & better world, *we* are left.—yes, *you*, the first acquaintance I made, are now my *oldest* & dearest friend—a sincere & faithful friend is one of the greatest blessings of life—Amidst

all our deprivations, *that blessing is ours*—& will I trust  
continue to be so while life is continued to you & your  
unchanged friend

M. HARRISON SMITH.

1842

Washington Assemblies

Managers

Hon Wm C Preston

Hon Daniel Webster

Ch. Lee Jones

J. Mandeville Carlisle

Phil. Barton Key

D<sup>r</sup> R. T. Barry U S N

Hon W<sup>m</sup> Cost Johnson

Gen<sup>l</sup>. George Gibson

Com. Beverly Kennon

Gen<sup>l</sup> Alex. Hunter

Richard Wallach

Henry May

Rich<sup>d</sup>. Hall

Lieut. T. L. Ringgold U S A

The honor of Mrs. Thornton's

Company is requested at the Washington Assemblies.

Mrs. Thornton's tribute to Mrs. Smith:

"On Sunday (the 9<sup>th</sup> Int) I performed the melancholy  
duty of attending with the mourning relatives, the funeral  
of my much loved friend M<sup>rs</sup>. S—consort of the respectable  
& highly respected Mr. S—to their Vault at Rock Creek  
Church where her remains were deposited by the side of  
her two (once lovely) Daughters who departed this life  
some years since Mrs. S.—was as wife mother relation &  
friend, as faultless as human nature would allow—& was  
universally respected & esteemed & beloved by all who had  
the pleasure of her acquaintance. Charitable in the full  
sense of the word, generous & hospitable, she will never  
cease to be regretted by all—rich—& poor—Her whole life  
was one of benevolence & *good* deeds—piety & charity—to  
her husband, children & grand children her life is irrepar-  
able—

Many of her literary productions, evincing talent & genius are much admired, & all tended to the furtherance of morality—& Love to God & Man—I hope some more able pen will soon do honor to her memory & record in a more worthy & lasting manner her many Virtues—& the merits of her long & useful Life—

A—

In trembling hand are the lines of the aged ex-President:

Lines.

To my kind, intellectual and benevolent friend and next door neighbor at Washington

Mrs. Thornton.

Oh! if the feelings of the heart  
     In WORDS could find expression;  
 When dearest friends are doom'd to part;  
     And Truth transcends profession;  
 Then should my tuneful lyre awake  
     The soundest of thy slumbers;  
 And thrilling strains thy spirit shake,  
     With more than magic numbers.  
 But what are Words—a breath of air  
     From human lips exported;  
 In which the Heart has oft no share—  
     With falsehood oft assorted—  
 A flitting zephyr, false or true  
     You know not where to find him,  
 Who comes, and vanishes from view:  
     Nor leaves a trace behind him.  
 WORDS! Never! Never can they tell  
     The Souls intense emotion!  
 Can never speak the bosom's swell;  
     The faithful heart's devotion.  
 Then, Lady! let this simple lay,  
     Until again I meet thee:  
 For thee a silent blessing pray  
     And still in *Silence* greet thee!

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,

Quincy, Massachusetts 15 July 1844.

And this is only a slight selection from Mrs. Adams' letter:

“Quincy 23<sup>d</sup> July 1844

\* \* \* Long my Dear Madam may the old and highly valued friendship which has subsisted without interruption *last*; for it is a grateful link to charm the late period of a life, which has been too worldly and frivolous to claim many such blessings—

LOUISA CATHERINE ADAMS.

The Rochambeau,  
February 13 1914

*Dear Sir,*

In reply to your inquiry about Mrs. Thornton's appearance I would say she was quite small. Whether that was due to her being an old lady or not I do not know, but as I remember her she was very short she always wore dainty white caps, and the hair which showed in front was brown. She had beautiful big brown eyes, keen, yet soft, wore a simple black dress with a little white shawl thrown round her shoulders. Her hearing, eyesight, mind and memory were good to the very last and she was always alive and interested in whatever concerned her friends and in the current news of the day. Mr. Gaillard Hunt at the Washington Club a week or so ago spoke of what a wonderful man Dr. Thornton was, and yet how little known—he spoke of his having been really the inventor of the steamboat, though Fulton got the credit, through getting hold of Dr. Thornton's drawings. His talk carried me back to the many times I had heard Mrs. Thornton speak of her husband having invented the first steam boat and her grief over the little recognition his talents and services had ever obtained and it seemed so strange now to hear honor paid to him and his wonderful genius and influence proclaimed when all who were so deeply interested were gone and it has made me think a great deal of Mrs. Thornton lately so your question came in strangely. I wish I could give you an idea of her as I see her in my mind's eye—sitting in her armchair

by the window in her parlours—a little table with her glasses, books and papers at her right hand—her room a veritable museum of beautiful old things, from the tapestry covered chairs to the paintings and bric-a-brac around in great profusion—and she, so simple hearted and sweet. My mother was a great comfort to her and so tenderly interested in all that concerned her and tried to encourage her—some day, justice would be done.

Very truly yours

VIRGINIA MILLER.

To

Mr. Allen C. Clark.

Mrs. Thornton worshipped at St. John's. She continued to live many years in the old home as the guest of Dr. Thomas Miller, who acquired it.

Mrs. Thornton died, Tuesday August 16 1865. She was in her ninetieth year.

I am indebted for the portraits reproduced to Mrs. Sterling Murray, Miss Virginia Miller and Miss Florence Fendall.